

filling a space enclosed by said thin film, said frame and said mask with specific gas having a characteristic of absorbing little of said exposure light before transporting said mask into said sealed space; and

transporting said mask onto a predetermined position in said sealed space and transferring said pattern onto said substrate.

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54. (Amended) An exposure method that transfers a pattern of a mask onto a substrate by irradiating said mask with exposure light, the exposure method comprising:

filling a sealed space that covers at least an optical path near said mask of the optical path of said exposure light from said mask to said substrate with low-absorbent gas that has a characteristic of absorbing little of said exposure light;

irradiating said mask with an energy beam in an ultraviolet range before transporting said mask into said sealed space; and

transporting said mask onto a predetermined position in said sealed space and transferring said pattern onto said substrate.

IN THE ABSTRACT

Please amend the Abstract on page 124 to read as follows:

ABSTRACT

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After a mask is carried into a reserve room for temporarily storing before carrying into a mask room filled with specific gas that has an impurity concentration lower than a first concentration (e.g. 1ppb) and that has a characteristic of absorbing little exposure light, gas-replacement mechanisms replace gas in the reserve room with specific gas having an oxygen concentration not lower than the first concentration. Therefore, when subsequently carrying the mask into the mask room, impurities from the outside (including absorbent gas) can be substantially prevented from getting into the optical path inside the mask room. When replacing a wafer, gas in a reserve room is also replaced in the same way as the above.